5.8 Ibn Maḏâ' s call for the abolition of the principles of ellipsis

In addition to his bold views and his call for the abolition of the theory of government as explained in Chapter Four, Ibn Maḏâ' also criticised Arabic grammatical theory for its tendency to assume elements in the sentence. He believed that grammarians have done this only to maintain the symmetry of the various grammatical rules. He classified elements regularly assumed to be ellipted into three types, as follows.

TYPE 1

Ellipsis of an element, which is essential to the sentence but which the addressee can easily guess. Ibn Maḏâ' (1988: 78–79) quotes the Qur'ânic verse (91, 13) as an example:

> *nâqat-a Allâh-i wa suqyâhâ*

> A she-camel of God and [bar her not from] having her drink.

Grammarians argue that this verse contains an ellipted verb making the assumed structure of the sentence read:

> *dharû nâqat-a Allâh-i wa suqyâhâ*
> Leave a she-camel of God and [bar her not from] having her drink.

The verb *dharû* (leave) governs the direct object *nâqat-a* (she-camel) in the accusative (cf. Versteegh 1997a: 146 –147; Abdeljaber 1995:136).

TYPE 2

Ellipses of unnecessary elements in the sentence structure. For example, grammarians claim that the sentence

> *a Zayd-an ḍarabtah-u*
> As for Zayd, did you hit him

must have the assumed structure:

> *a ḍrabata Zayd-an ḍarabtah-u.*

Here the ellipted verb, in the grammarians' view, is the one that governs the direct object *Zayd-an* in the accusative case. This is because the verb present in the sentence is engaged in governing the pronoun *ha* (cf. 5.5).

TYPE 3

Ellipsis of hypothetical elements that when shown in the surface structure of the sentence result in the sentence having a meaning different from the one originally intended. For example, the grammarians claim that the assumed structure of the sentence

> *yâ Zayd* (O Zayd)

must be

> *ad'û Zayd-an*
> I call Zayd.

Here the expressed sentence implies the call, while the assumed sentence merely informs the addressee about the invitation of Zayd by the speaker (cf. Versteegh 1997: 147–149; Abdejaber 1985: 136-138; Wolfe 1984: 68-71).

Ibn Maḍâ' (1988: 81) stresses that the process of assuming elements ellipted in the sentence is not a correct methodology and in particular should not be applied to the Holy Qur'ân. He writes:

ammâ ṭard-u dhâlika fî kitâb-i Allâh-i ta'âlâ alladhî lâ ya'tîh al-bâṭil min bayn yadayh wa lâ min khalfih wa iddi'â' ziyâdat ma'ânî fîh-i min ghayr-i ḥâjjah wa lâ dalîl illâ al-qawl bi-anna kull-a mâ yunṣab innamâ yunṣab-u bi-nâṣib ... al-qawl-u bi-dhâlika ḥarâm

Assuming ellipted elements in God's Book, which is immune from fault in any respect and claiming that it might contain additional meanings without good reason or evidence, such as the assumption that every word in the accusative must have a governing word ... to claim that is a sin.

It is also relevant to point out that Ibn Maḍâ' rejects the view that latent pronouns exist in Arabic. He criticises the assumption of ellipted pronouns in the sentence structure which is frequent in Arabic grammatical theory.

Pronouns are considered by Arabic grammatical theory to function as nouns in the sentence. They can be governed in the nominative, the accusative or the genitive. An example of this is

ḍaraba Zayd-un 'Amr-an

where the word *Zayd-un* in this case is performing the function of the subject and the word *'Amr-an* is performing the function of the direct object. Pronouns can also perform the function of ordinary words. For example, the *tu* in the sentence

darab-tu-hu (I hit him) is performing the function of the subject and the *hu* is performing the function of the direct object.

Arabic grammatical theory considers some pronouns to be latent. Neither overt nouns nor free pronouns can be substituted for them. The following table shows that these pronouns can take nine forms.

EXAMPLE	FUNCTION PERFORMED BY THE LATENT PRONOUN
1. *uktub...* write	Subject of an imperative verb used in addressing a masculine singular entity.
2. *ta 'rif-u... Zayd-an* You know Zayd	Subject of a verb in the present perfect used to address a masculine singular entity.
3. *aktub-u ... kull-a yawm* I write everyday	Subject of a present perfect tense used for the first person
4. *nuqaddir-u ... al-'ilm-a* We value knowledge	Subject of a present perfect used for the plural
5. *hadara al-tullâb-u 'adâ ...* *wahid-an* The students came except one	Subject of a past tense implying exception
6. *hadara al-tullâb-u laysa ...* *Zayd-an* The students came except Zayd	Noun of *laysa* (subject) is governed in the nominative
7. *mâ ahsana ... Zayd-an* How good is Zayd	Subject of a verb of wonder in the past tense
8. *âmîn ...* Amin	Subject of a verbal noun
9. *qiyâm-an ... li-Zayd-in* Stand up for Zayd	Subject of an infinitive

Ibn Madâ' (1988: 88–93) tried to find an alternative to this assumption of these latent pronouns. For instance, he argues that verbs indicate not only tense and action but also indicate the agents. With respect to imperfect verbs *af'âl mudâri'ah* Arab grammarians argue that the initial *ya* of the third person masculine singular, *a* of the first person masculine singular, *ta* of the third person feminine singular and second person masculine singular and the *na* of the first

person plural cannot be counted as pronouns. They argue that these prefixes indicate the imperfect tense only *ḥurûf al-muḍâra'ah*. However, Ibn Maḍâ' argues that the prefixes *ya, a, ta* and *na* should be considered as indicated of the verbal stem to which they are attached. This can be illustrated by the following example.

> *aktub-u kull-a yawm-in*

> I write every day

The prefix *a* indicates that the subject is the speaker himself and that therefore there is no need to assume an ellipted pronoun after the verb. Ibn Maḍâ' adds that the morphological formulation of verbs or nouns derived from verbs will in fact indicate the subject, and the assumption of ellipted pronouns after them is in his view one of the things that should be dropped from Arabic grammatical theory to make it simpler.

It should be pointed out that the positions in which ellipsis can take place in the Arabic sentence which are discussed here do not cover all the cases considered by the Arab grammarians. This chapter has simply aimed to put forward and consider in some detail the most important points associated with the ellipsis of elements from the Arabic sentence. It has also aimed to shed light on many aspects of Arab grammarians' approaches to the sentence by examining those elements which grammarians assume have been ellipted from the sentence.